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NEWS RELEASE

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How Does Our Garden Grow? **by Senator Larry Craig**

Property taxes. Sprawl. Congestion. These are just a few of the challenges – and complaints – that come with population growth, no matter where you go. While Idaho still possesses a strong rural character, many of our cities and towns are beginning to experience these new challenges.

Economic and population growth are difficult subjects to deal with. People come to Idaho largely for the quality of life. We have low crime rates, clean air, good schools, and the twin kickers: scenic beauty and close proximity to world-class recreation opportunities. But many feel that too much growth will spoil it all and negate the good things about Idaho.

If left completely unchecked and unmanaged, growth could do those things. However, if we seek to restrict or stop growth, rather than to shape and direct it, we run the risk of strangling it altogether. Having staked out a piece of Idaho, some might like to close the gate behind themselves, and say “No more newbies!” Such thinking, while understandable, is dangerous to the prosperity of all in our state, and puts too much weight on the negative aspects of growth.

In reality, there are quite a lot of positives about the stream of people coming to our state. Many are bringing businesses – small and large – with them, and creating jobs. So many jobs are being created in Idaho that there almost aren’t enough workers to fill them. The state’s current unemployment rate is a miniscule 2.8 percent right now.

A frequent criticism of the jobs being created here is that they’re “service sector” jobs that don’t pay a living wage. That may be true of some jobs, but it’s not the whole story. The U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis reported last year that between 2003 and 2005, Idaho’s personal income “increased nearly 16 percent,” ranking us third in the nation for that time.

A surprising fact is that Idaho also ranked third in 2005 in percentage of exports coming from high-tech firms, according to the Idaho Department of Commerce and Labor website. Of the top 10 nations buying goods from Idaho last year, seven were in Asia, buying 64 percent of all Idaho goods shipped overseas. Of those exports, 88 percent were high-tech.

In addition to the jobs created, many new restaurants, retail stores, and entertainment opportunities have followed our state’s population boom. As Idaho grows, the need to travel across

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state lines to shop, get Thai food, or attend concerts diminishes. That means Idaho dollars are spent in Idaho.

Idaho's growing economy and population aren't evenly distributed, and they don't come trouble-free. That's why I have continued to work throughout my time in Congress on behalf of Idaho's rural communities, so they aren't left behind as the state's economic engine takes off.

The Gem State's growth is just another example of capitalism at work. People and businesses come here because they like what our state has to offer. Do we throw the doors open and allow our culture and our way of life to be overrun? No. But let me draw a comparison. In the free market, businesses adjust to meet demand and continue attracting new customers. They don't close the doors and send buyers across the street to a competitor.

Having said that, our communities cannot sacrifice the needs and concerns of their loyal customers – those who live here – in order to attract new ones. Local governments must remain engaged with the public and maintain open lines of communication about how to grow. It can be done: Idaho can grow and still remain Idaho.